

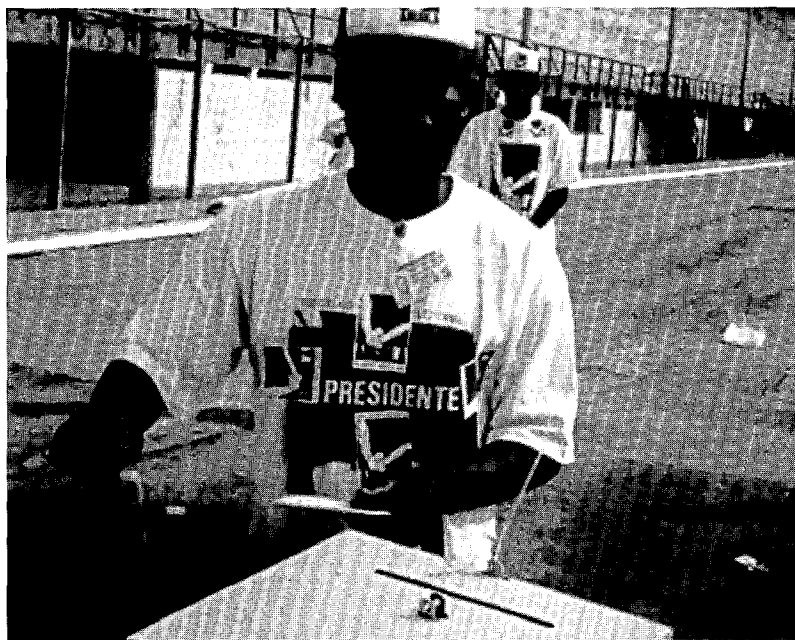
FROM BULLETS TO BALLOTS

# ANGOLA'S FAILED ELECTIONS

ELECTORAL  
ASSISTANCE TO  
POSTCONFLICT SOCIETIES



PN-ABY-245



## Angola's Failed Elections

**A** *brief transition, incomplete demobilization, and no provision for power-sharing doomed Angola's first democratic elections, held in September 1992, and sent the country back into civil war before the results were even tabulated.*

### A Legacy of Colonialism And Conflict

Since the West's great age of discovery, Angola has scarcely known anything but colonial status and civil war. Portugal established its first colony in Angola in 1575, and over the centuries this West African land was a source of slaves for the Portuguese colony in Brazil. Except for a brief Dutch occupation (1641–48), Angola remained under Portuguese control until independence in 1975.

*Photograph of voting in Angola courtesy of International Foundation for Election Systems.*

## Contents

Report written by Marina Ottaway, political scientist and visiting professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced Studies.

A Legacy of Colonialism and Conflict .....	1
Foreign Powers Add to the Fray .....	3
The Peace Process .....	4
Ill Prepared for Elections .....	5
Conducting Elections .....	6
Election Results .....	9
International Assistance .....	10
Lessons Learned .....	11

Angola experienced little economic development until oil was discovered in the 1960s. The country then underwent a period of rapid growth and industrialization, just as it began its liberation struggle. Guerrilla warfare first broke out in 1961 and is still going on. Consequently, despite its oil wealth, the country remains extremely underdeveloped.

Two movements originally spearheaded the liberation effort: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA). The urban-oriented MPLA drew much of its support from the better educated Angolans, including many *mestiços* (Africans with some Portuguese blood), from urban workers, and from the Mbundu population. (The Mbundu, concentrated in the area around Luanda and eastward, had prolonged, intensive contact with

the Portuguese colonial rulers.) The FNLA's support base was among the Bakongo, an ethnic group concentrated in the northwest. In 1966 a third movement, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (Unita), was formed. Founded and led by the European-educated Dr. Jonas Savimbi, Unita drew its support predominantly from the Ovimbundu population of central and southeastern Angola. Relations between the three movements were extremely difficult through the liberation struggle (see box).

In 1974 a coup in Portugal brought to power radical military officers who immediately started preparing all colonies for independence in 1975. The Portuguese tried to negotiate an agreement among the three Angolan movements, but civil war broke out even before independence day.

## Foreign Powers Add to the Fray

The MPLA, which controlled the cities, established itself as the new government. It won widespread diplomatic recognition, though not from the United States. The FNLA faded from the picture. Unita, with support from South Africa and the United States, grew into a strong armed opposition movement.

External support complicated the civil war, contributing to its duration and the level of fighting. Because the MPLA, a Marxist-oriented movement, began receiving Soviet and Cuban support before independence, the United States and South Africa regarded it with suspicion. Cuban troops intervened in Angola on the side of the MPLA, and Soviet aid increased at independence, flaming those suspicions.

South Africa had security concerns. It feared that MPLA-governed Angola would allow the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo—the Namibian group fighting for independence from South African rule) to mount operations from its territory, offer safe haven to the African National Congress (South Africa's oldest nonwhite political organization), and facilitate a Soviet subversion of southern Africa. South Africa provided Unita with arms and repeatedly sent military units to conduct operations in Angolan territory. The U.S. Congress suspended American aid to Unita from 1976 through 1985. But it resumed after the administration of Ronald Reagan singled out Savimbi as a freedom fighter in a war against a communist regime.

### Angola's Liberation Movements Garner Support From Many Quarters

**MPLA:** Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Domestic support from the Mbundu, the second-largest ethnolinguistic group in the country, who live in the north. International support from the Soviet Union (weapons and advisers) and Cuba (troops).

**FNLA:** National Front for the Liberation of Angola. Domestically, supported by the Bakongo, an ethnic group of the northwest, who initiated one of the first major revolts in the nationalist struggle. The Bakongo provided slaves for the Portuguese in Brazil. International support from Zaire (bases and troops) and the United States (money, and hiring of mercenaries).

**Unita:** National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. Domestic support from the Ovimbundu, the largest ethnolinguistic group, of central and southeastern Angola. International support from South Africa and the United States.

In December 1988, Angola, Cuba, and South Africa reached an agreement with the help of the Soviet Union and the United States. Under the terms of the agreement, Cuba withdrew its troops from Angola, and South Africa granted Namibia independence in March 1990.

The agreement removed some of the international character of the Angolan civil war. Enmity continued between MPLA and Unita, however, owing more to their leaders' ambitions than to ideological differences between the movements. It took two more years of negotiations before the two signed the peace accord known as the Bicesse Agreement in May 1991. Portugal, the Soviet Union, and the United States acted as facilitators and later monitored implementation of the agreement. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia took its place as monitor.

# The Peace Process

The 1992 elections took place during an imperfect and unstable peace. The Bicesse Agreement was reached only because the two sides had reached a stalemate: the MPLA had proved its superiority in conventional warfare while Unita had conducted effective, disruptive commando operations.

The agreement called for an immediate cease-fire, the quartering of the MPLA and Unita armies at assembly points within 60 days of the cease-fire, and demobilization of the troops. Under the agreement, a new army of 40,000 would be formed, drawn in equal numbers from the MPLA and Unita. It was also agreed that elections would be held between September 1 and November 30, 1992. A body called the Joint Verification and Monitoring Commission oversaw implementation of the agreement. The commission consisted of representatives of the MPLA government and Unita, with representatives from Portugal, the Soviet Union, and the United States acting as observers. The United Nations was responsible for demobilizing military personnel and supervising the police force. However, the role of the UN was much more limited than in Namibia's transition, because the MPLA refused to allow a massive UN presence, which it saw as a violation of sovereignty.

The agreement was sketchy on details for the elections and the political transition. It simply established that elections would be held for a president and, by proportional representation, a national assembly.

The date selected was a compromise between the MPLA's demand for a four-year transition and Unita's insistence on one year. Until the election, administration of the country remained in the hands of the MPLA government.

Government authority was to extend to the areas previously controlled by Unita. The government would continue controlling the police force as well. The two parties agreed to respect the fundamental principles of democracy—freedom of speech, association, and access to media, and freedom to organize and campaign over the entire territory for all political parties.

The principles were stated in general terms, however. No mechanisms were put in place to continue negotiations to deepen the agreement. Democracy was expected to emerge from a formal electoral process although the country was barely at peace.

Overall supervision of the peace agreement was entrusted to a Joint Political-Military Commission. Like the verification and monitoring commission, which it also supervised, it was composed of representatives of the government and Unita, with representatives of Portugal, the Soviet Union, and the United States acting as observers.

The provisions of the peace agreement led to the failure of the elections. Absent prolonged negotiations about the principles to be respected by any future government, and absent establishment of mechanisms to allow the two parties to start working together to govern the country, the elections took on a winner-take-all

**The agreement was sketchy on details for the elections and the political transition.**

quality. Far too much depended on a single event—the elections—to determine which of two movements that had fought each other for two decades would control not only the government but the economy as well.

Such a sudden transition could have been successful only if the leadership of the two movements had been wholeheartedly committed to democracy. But neither side had exhibited any democratic inclinations.

Demobilization of Unita and MPLA troops lagged far behind schedule and was never completed. By June 1992, 10 months after the process was supposed to be completed, an estimated 85 percent of Unita forces and 37 percent of MPLA forces were encamped, according to the United Nations. When encampment formally ended in September, however, the United Nations concluded that about 80 percent of government troops had been demobilized, but “a much lower proportion” of Unita guerrillas. The figures are uncertain, but the resumption of fighting proved there were massive violations.

The MPLA shifted 10,000 to 20,000 of its elite troops to what it termed a riot police force. Unita kept heavy weapons and an estimated 25,000 troops in the bush. In the end, Unita was more successful in keeping its forces intact. When fighting resumed in October 1992, Unita established control over much of the country. The MPLA needed several months to reorganize before it regained lost territory.

As a result, the planned Armed Forces of Angola was never formed,

except on paper. The Bicesse Agreement called for 20,000 volunteer recruits each from among Unita and MPLA troops. By September 1992, only a few hundred officers had been trained and commissioned in the new army. However, President José Eduardo dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi signed a declaration on September 26 that abolished the two armies and ostensibly launched the Armed Forces of Angola.

The UN Angola Verification Mission monitors were aware of the problems in making the shift to a new national force but had neither the personnel nor the mandate to intervene. The UN operation was grossly understaffed. It had only 350 military and 126 civilian police observers, compared with the 7,000 people it mobilized to supervise elections in Namibia, a country with one tenth the population of Angola. In March 1992, the UN's mandate was expanded to include monitoring and verifying the electoral process, from voter registration to the elections. Some personnel were added, but the UN venture remained understaffed.

## Ill Prepared For Elections

The elections took place in an extremely unfavorable social and economic climate. The Angolan people are poor and largely illiterate. The UN Development Program's 1993 Human Development Report ranked the country 126th of 173 developing countries in terms of gross national product per capita. It also ranked the country 160th on a human development index measuring real purchas-

**Democracy  
was expected  
to emerge  
from a formal  
electoral  
process  
although the  
country was  
barely at  
peace.**

**Angola faced not only the challenge of building democracy but also of building a state and developing a national consciousness.**

ing power, health, and education. Angola has no stable middle class. The country has not known a sustained period of peace since the beginning of the uprising against the Portuguese in 1961.

The colonial legacy, the civil war, and the socialist policies enacted by the MPLA after independence are responsible for the extreme poverty of Angola, a country rich in oil and diamonds and endowed with adequate agricultural land. At the time of the elections, the government was, in theory, committed to economic reform. Indeed, plans to liberalize the economy had been discussed and adopted, on paper, since 1986.

Those plans included decentralization, more autonomy for plant managers, and provision for private entrepreneurs to operate. But the plans have not been carried out. The failure to liberalize the economy creates another obstacle to a democratic transition: the party that wins the elections acquires control not only over the government but over the country's economy as well.

Angolans have no experience with democratic government. The political leadership was not committed to a democratic transition or even to peace, but was driven to accept both because of a deadlock that proved temporary. Finally, Angola has no history as a functioning, unified state. It has been divided and at war since independence. At the time of the elections, therefore, Angola faced not only the challenge of building democracy but also of building a state and developing a national consciousness.

The ethnic diversity of the population, and above all the politicization

of ethnicity, makes creation of a national consciousness difficult. The largest and politically most influential ethnic groups are the Ovimbundu (about 37 percent), the Mbundu (about 23 percent), and the Bakongo (about 14 percent).

During the war for independence, the political movements in the country developed strong ethnic affiliations. The 1992 election results, however, indicate that ethnicity was not the only or perhaps even the dominant factor in voting. For example, the FNLA, which historically drew its support from the Bakongo, received less than 2.5 percent of the total vote in the legislative elections, while the Mbundu-backed MPLA received 53.7 percent. However, regional patterns remain—Unita has stronger support among the Ovimbundu of the south.

## **Conducting Elections**

In the 16 months between the signing of the peace agreement and the elections, the Angolan parties and the international monitors had an enormous amount to accomplish. Demobilization was a daunting task, but the political challenges were also huge.

Constitutional amendments had to be approved and laws had to be passed on political parties and elections. Electoral commissions had to be organized. Voters had to be registered; polling stations had to be set up, and personnel for them had to be trained. Ballots and other materials had to be distributed in time for election day.



All this was to be carried out in a country with a tenuous cease-fire, deep suspicion among the major political parties, destroyed infrastructure, and no election experience. The result? On the military side, an unsuccessful demobilization process. On the political side, successful completion of the technical steps required to hold an election, but no political reconciliation.

International representatives did a remarkable job of solving the logistical and technical problems of organizing the elections. Where the problems were political rather than technical, such as the unwillingness of the MPLA and Unita to demobilize and to accept the outcome of a democratic process, the international community could not deliver a solution. The elections were doomed by the lack of continuing negotiations between the two sides to consolidate the shaky peace and develop a consensus about a political system both could accept.

## ***Making Basic Changes***

The constitution was first amended in April 1991 to abolish the single-party system. It was further revised in August, a month before the elections, to provide for a unitary presidential system. The amendment put in the hands of the central government all power, including guiding economic development under a system of public, private, cooperative, and family property.

The president was to be elected to a five-year term under universal suffrage. If no candidate received the absolute majority of votes in the first round, a second round would be

held between the top two candidates. The president was to appoint the prime minister and the cabinet. He had the right to disband the parliament and call new elections.

The unicameral National Assembly was to be elected to a four-year term, using proportional representation. Five members, elected from provincial lists, were to represent each province. However, the majority of the members were to be elected from national lists.

The system was ill suited to power-sharing. Although the constitution embodied the principle of proportional representation, the power given to the president to a large extent nullified its effect.

Election preparations started slowly. "It could not be said that electoral preparations by the government of Angola were evident," stated a preelection assessment prepared for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in March 1992. Two months later, the U.S.-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute concluded after a preelection assessment mission that "the prospects for conducting meaningful elections as scheduled for September 29-30, 1992, are dubious."

The election law, approved on April 28, 1992, provided the structural framework under which elections could be held. On May 9, the national election council was set up. It included government officials and judges, a number of experts, and representatives of all registered political parties. The provincial electoral councils and the municipal electoral councils were similarly composed.

**The elections  
were doomed  
by the lack of  
continuing  
negotiations  
between the  
two sides.**



**The election campaign was relatively peaceful. However, the atmosphere was tense.**

## ***The Campaign Period***

Voter registration started May 20 and was extended to August 10. About 4.8 million people were registered, which the UN estimated was 91 percent of eligible voters. But population estimates were both uncertain and politically loaded. The provincial governor estimated the population of Cuando Cubango, a Savimbi stronghold, at 178,000; Unita put it at 549,000. In some regions well over 100 percent of estimated eligible voters registered (198 percent in Cuando Cubango). In other regions, only an estimated 60 percent were registered.

Candidates registered in mid-August. Eighteen parties registered lists for the parliamentary elections, and 13 presented candidates for the presidential elections.

The election campaign, which took place throughout during September, was relatively peaceful. Incidents of violence were relatively few and were resolved locally. However, the atmosphere was tense. Both major parties were still armed, and freedom of movement was limited in many parts of the country—above all, those controlled by Unita. The poor condition of the infrastructure and the widespread dissemination of land mines further limited freedom of movement.

Political parties taking part in the elections did not have equal access to the media. The MPLA controlled the only daily newspaper in the country, *Jornal de Angola*. During the election

period, Unita published the weekly *Terra Angolana*, which was printed in Portugal and flown into Angola. No other political parties had regular publications.

The government controlled the country's one television channel, but television reached only half the provinces, and few people had access to TV sets.

Both the MPLA and Unita controlled radio stations. The MPLA had four channels, broadcasting in Portuguese and several African languages. Unita had its own "Voice of the Resistance of the Black Cockerel," the party's symbol.

During the formal election campaign, all parties were allotted 10 minutes daily on TV and 20 minutes on radio. So limited were the resources of some parties, though, that they could not use the time on a regular basis.

In sum, although television and print media reached only a small percentage of the population, only the MPLA and Unita had access to radio. It is highly doubtful that the Angolan public depended on the media to formulate its opinions of the MPLA and Unita; people were probably familiar enough to make an informed choice between the two. It is possible, however, that lack of media access, together with lack of resources, doomed the new parties to oblivion; voters probably did not know enough about them to consider them.

## Election Results

The elections were held September 29–30 as scheduled, even though demobilization was incomplete, indications of an MPLA victory were mounting, and Unita leader Jonas Savimbi was issuing alarming statements that he would not accept an electoral defeat.

The voting took place at 5,579 polling stations. More than 90 percent of registered voters participated. The mechanics of voting, however, were new to voters. Illiteracy complicated the problem of recognizing the correct party or candidate symbols and marking the ballot properly. The ballot papers themselves were visually confusing. Because of these problems, more than 10 percent of the ballots were initially declared blank or spoiled. In a subsequent reexamination, more ballots were accepted, but the situation contributed to confusion and to accusations of fraud.

According to observers, voting was uneventful. They recorded minor procedural violations but no gross irregularities. Most polling stations opened on time and were correctly manned and equipped. There were no visible signs of voters being intimidated. Few voters were turned away because their registration cards were deemed false or otherwise invalid.

The few international observers visited only a few polling stations, staying briefly at each. Their observations are given added credence, though, by the presence of representatives of rival political parties at all polling stations. Indeed, there were

no complaints of vote tampering until the counting started.

Votes were first counted at each polling station by election officials and in the presence of party delegates. Observers found this process very slow, in part owing to the many spoiled ballots. The ballots and a tabulation of results were then delivered to the provincial election office, where new delays ensued as spoiled ballots were reexamined. Results were eventually sent to the capital, Luanda, but the process was delayed and results were not released for more than two weeks. By then the country had reverted to war.

The national election council released official elections results on October 17, 1992. President dos Santos received 49.6 percent of the vote and Savimbi 40.1 percent. No other candidates received more than about 2 percent of the vote. Since dos Santos narrowly missed receiving an absolute majority, a runoff was to take place between him and Savimbi.

In the legislative elections, the MPLA received 53.7 percent of the vote and Unita 34.1 percent. No other party received more than 2.5 percent. Savimbi and Unita had more support in the central highlands and the south, the MPLA and dos Santos in the rest of the country. The vote was not strictly ethnic, however. Bakongo voters, for one, showed no interest in supporting the FNLA, although they had been the support base for the FNLA when it was one of the original liberation movements.

**Results were not released for more than two weeks. By then the country had reverted to war.**

**Angola is still far from a transition to peace, let alone a transition to democracy.**

## ***Unita Rejects Outcome***

Unita refused to accept early results indicating a probable MPLA victory. On October 3, broadcasting on the Unita-controlled radio station, Savimbi claimed Unita was winning both presidential and legislative elections in all provinces. Claims to the contrary were fraudulent, he said, and the judgment of the international observers was irrelevant. Unita allegations about MPLA electoral fraud escalated from then on, with some other parties joining in.

The United Nations, the United States, and other Western governments accepted the election results. Margaret Anstee, the UN secretary general's special representative to Angola, certified that "with all deficiencies taken into account, the elections held on 29 and 30 September can be considered to have been generally free and fair." She acknowledged that there had been some irregularities during the voting but dismissed them as the result of error rather than fraud, concluding that they did not affect election results.

A more detailed internal UN report of October 16 was more critical of the elections but still did not talk of fraud. The United Nations' conclusion about the fairness of the published results was based in part on its own vote count in a supposedly representative sample of 166 polling stations. On the basis of that count, UN officials had predicted nationwide returns in the presidential elections remarkably close to the official final count.

## ***Angola Returns To War***

By the time election results were announced, Unita officers had withdrawn from the new joint army, and Savimbi had retreated to central Angola. Despite efforts by UN officials and U.S. diplomats, the conflict resumed. Unita, which had kept its army more intact, scored impressive victories in the first few months. But the MPLA rallied, and a new stalemate was reached. New negotiations between the government and Unita led to the Lusaka Protocol in November 1994. But the demobilization process called for in the agreement has lagged behind the timetable. At the time of this writing in January 1997, Angola is still far from a transition to peace, let alone a transition to democracy.

## ***International Assistance***

Absent international assistance, elections could not have taken place in Angola. The United Nations, the United States, and 10 other Western donors provided necessary financing and solved the technical and logistical problems.

The United States was closely involved in the entire process, from brokering the peace agreement and monitoring the Joint Political-Military Commission and the Joint Verification and Monitoring Commission to helping organize the elections. In 1992 it provided \$5.2 million in electoral assistance. The main contribution of the United States to the election and demobilization process

was logistical support. U.S. transport planes and personnel took demobilized soldiers to their home regions in August and September and helped distribute election materials.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, together with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute, working jointly, implemented election-related programs in Angola. The three organizations also carried out preelection assessments. (Some of their conclusions are cited in this report.) The National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute implemented a political party training and civic education project.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems developed and distributed voter information literature. It financed and trained six teams of Angolan trainers in voter awareness, and the teams reached about 30,000 people before the elections. The foundation also fielded 39 international election observers. As part of this project, it distributed 350,000 voter education booklets and 30,000 posters teaching the mechanics of voting.

The United Nations' involvement was substantial. But the UN mission supervising demobilization was weak and could not ensure the success of demobilization. Nor did it have a mandate to postpone elections until demobilization had taken place.

The UN Development Program's coordination of donor efforts was satisfactory, except for monitoring the voting—400 UN observers and an additional 400 sent by nongovern-

mental organizations acted independently of each other. However, the delegations by and large concurred with the UN evaluation that the elections were reasonably free and fair.

Responsibility for the failure of the elections rests with Unita for refusing to accept the results. But the international community unwittingly contributed to the debacle by supporting elections under the most unfavorable socioeconomic circumstances, in the absence of a real political agreement by the major parties, and on an unrealistic schedule.

The tight schedule forced donors to zero in on electoral assistance rather than on more broadly conceived democratization assistance. There was not enough time to promote prolonged negotiations among political parties to reach some consensus on how power would be exercised and possibly shared, or to build civil society, promote civic education, or help transform armed movements into political parties.

## Lessons Learned

Although the problems that caused the elections to fail are clear, it is less clear whether it was within the power of the donors to solve them. Lessons learned include firm conclusions about what should not have been done (hindsight is of great help here). But suggestions about what might have led to a more positive outcome are tentative. The first part

**There was not enough time to promote prolonged negotiations among political parties to reach some consensus.**

of this discussion looks at the process as a whole. The remainder looks at specific issues.

## ***Rethinking the Process***

The process that failed in the Angolan elections can be summed up in the following way:

1. *A narrowly focused peace agreement.* The agreement was narrowly drawn, dealing primarily with military issues. It glossed over basic political problems. This is not a criticism of the agreement as such. With fighting still raging in the country, it was imperative to bring about a cease-fire and begin demobilization. But many more issues needed to be negotiated before meaningful elections could take place, including transitional mechanisms, possible power-sharing agreements, and basic principles that any future government should respect.

2. *A short transition period.* The length of the transition period was the result of a compromise, rather than an assessment of how much time was needed. By necessity, only the most basic technical steps in demobilizing the two armies and organizing the elections could be carried out. The international community needs to take a firmer stand on a realistic timetable, particularly when elections cannot be held without international help.

3. *A sudden closure of the process through elections.* One party won, the other lost. One would govern, the other would not. The parity that existed during the transition, when Unita and the MPLA were repre-

sented equally in the joint commissions and at the negotiating table, was suddenly destroyed.

Representatives of the Western donor community naturally did not think of elections as a closure. In a functioning democracy, policy-making is a never-ending process of negotiating and reaching compromises. These representatives saw the elections as a means to transfer negotiations from nonelected leaders to elected representatives of political parties. But Unita, and probably the MPLA, did not share this perception. Savimbi returned to war because, in his eyes, the elections closed the political contest for power. He returned to a military contest where he maintained considerable strength.

4. *Absence of any escape clause.* The peace agreement made no provision for what would happen in the event of difficulties during implementation. The two commissions (the Joint Verification and Monitoring Commission and the Joint Political-Military Commission) and the UN were to check on implementation but could not slow or stop the process if major problems arose.

The central lesson here is to avoid a sudden closure to transition. Steps that would have helped include

- *Continuing negotiations after the initial agreement.* In South Africa, for example, elections were preceded by a long period of talks, when the major parties reached compromises on a number of issues. They agreed on power-sharing, the fate of civil servants, and control over government-owned radio and television

stations. And they pledged to respect constitutional principles. By the time elections were held, minority parties had some guarantees that the winning party did not have unfettered freedom to impose its views.

The purpose of continuing negotiations is to limit the power of the party that will win the elections and give the losing party a stake in the system it has helped fashion. Continuing negotiations also helps teach parties that are at odds with each other—such as Unita and the MPLA—that they can work together. Though these negotiations can fail, if the parties cannot negotiate compromises, elections are meaningless, because the likelihood that the parties will abide by the results is nil.

- *Transitional mechanisms.* Since continuing negotiations require time, a much longer transition period is needed. Mechanisms needed to be set up to transfer a measure of power from the MPLA to Unita to allow it a greater role in running the country and to help the two parties learn to share governing responsibilities even before the elections. The power transfer is instrumental in separating government and party.

Such transitional mechanisms did not necessarily have to go so far as to establish a full-fledged government of national unity—the MPLA and Unita were still too far apart in 1991 to cooperate in such a government. Joint committees to oversee particularly sensitive government functions, including police activity, might have been a better starting point. Participation in transitional institutions would also have provided an important training opportunity for Unita, a guerrilla movement that had no experience in governing a country

and would undoubtedly have benefited from early exposure to the problems of administration.

A slower transition is more costly for the international community than a swift successful one. But it is probably much less costly than a swift failed transition that requires new negotiations and a new transition. Suffice it to say that the UN was still in Angola in 1997.

- *Escape clauses.* The danger of a transition that moves forward inexorably toward elections no matter what happens is clear. Unita and the MPLA had no incentive to demobilize quickly. Indeed, the more they procrastinated, the more likely they were to be well armed at the time of elections.

- *International pressure to move forward.* Escape clauses can stall a process indefinitely. This is happening now, with Angola seemingly caught in a transitional limbo that might be described as no war—no peace—no progress made in meeting peace accord requirements. Continuing international assistance to the transition should be made conditional on progress. And the benchmarks of progress and the penalties for not adhering to agreements should be negotiated in advance.

It is impossible to know whether the two sides would have been willing to compromise on such a transition process. But the mediators had significant leverage—the Angolans themselves were not in a position to organize elections without international assistance. This might have allowed the mediators to push for a different type of compromise, not regarding just time, but process as well.

**If the parties  
cannot  
negotiate  
compromises,  
elections are  
meaningless.**

**Demobilization  
started slowly  
and took  
longer than  
expected.**

## ***Dealing With Security***

Two crucial factors led to the failure of the Angolan elections: the incomplete demobilization of the conflicting armies and, more important, the end of the deadlock resulting from the partial demobilization.

Demobilization started slowly and took longer than expected. This appears to be the case in all countries. The first lesson here is to allot more time than is customary.

The peace agreement gave both sides ready-made excuses to cheat on demobilization. The MPLA took advantage of its control over the police force by transforming its best troops into a heavily armed political force, the so-called riot police. The agreement gave Unita the right to provide armed protection for its candidates. Unita used this as an excuse to infiltrate armed groups everywhere.

The security functions of the police must be clearly separated from the politically less sensitive crime-control functions. The parties need to have joint control where sensitive issues are concerned. In this area, transitional institutions are essential.

Demobilization was not only partial, it was uneven. By the time elections were held, Unita's army was more intact than that of the MPLA. With the possibility of a military victory, Unita had no incentive to accept an election loss. The lesson here is that demobilization cannot be allowed to break a military deadlock. If this happens, elections must be postponed until the balance is re-established.

## ***The Constitutional Model***

One lesson commonly derived from the Angolan failure concerns the dangers of winner-take-all constitutional models and the advisability of power-sharing systems. This needs elaboration. Any political system has advantages and shortcomings. And the way votes are distributed can have a profound effect on a specific political system. There is no power-sharing in proportional representation, for example, if one party gets all the votes.

No democratic system is winner take all. But all have that potential if one party wins an overwhelming victory. Some political systems entail more power-sharing. Federal systems create more centers of power; parliamentary systems enhance the role of all political parties in parliament. But federalism can be unjustifiably costly and cumbersome for small countries or countries with small populations. Under some circumstances, it can also enhance separatism. Parliamentary systems based on proportional representation can be hopelessly unstable.

While the Angolan constitution created a centralized system that did not lend itself well to power-sharing, it is doubtful that a different outcome would have resulted under another constitutional model, given the election results. A federal system would probably not have greatly enhanced Unita's power—the party carried only 4 of 18 provinces. Proportional representation did not prevent the MPLA from winning an absolute majority in the parliament. In a parliamentary system, therefore, the MPLA would have controlled the



executive just as strongly as in a presidential system. Finally, although the two parties might have been prevailed upon to negotiate a power-sharing agreement in 1992, attempts to reach an agreement guaranteeing a role for Savimbi—a power-sharing formula of sorts—are failing at present.

The potential impact of different political systems needs to be weighed carefully in postconflict elections. Rival parties need to be encouraged to choose institutions that allow the broadest possible representation and form coalition governments. But constitutional engineering cannot make up for the problems created by leadership, personalities, and lack of political will to accept democracy.

### ***Technical Problems***

Some problems arose concerning the training of election officials, the handling of spoiled ballots, and the presence of international observers. These did not cause the elections to fail, but they need to be addressed.

Election officials were insufficiently trained to count the vote, a situation that resulted in delays and confusion. Observers concurred that this was the weakest part of the election process. Adequate training in this area is important.

Clear guidelines are needed for handling improperly marked ballots—a problem likely to arise regularly where illiteracy is high. In the absence of such guidelines, handling improperly marked ballots was marked by delays, controversy, and much recounting. That opened the door to allegations of irregularities. Guidelines need to be issued well in advance of the elections and be known to all parties and observers.

Finally, international observers left prematurely, before the vote was counted. If observers are needed at all, they are needed during the vote count as well.

Technical assistance was spectacularly successful, conjuring technically sound elections out of an impossible situation. But the elections precipitated a return to war, demonstrating that technical electoral assistance can be politically dangerous. The know-how and experience of specialized organizations and the availability of modern communications and air transport can overcome logistical obstacles, but they cannot overcome political obstacles. Criteria need to be developed to outline minimum political preconditions before technical assistance should be considered.

**Constitutional engineering cannot make up for the problems created by leadership, personalities, and lack of political will to accept democracy.**